



"Smiling a great deal as she performed tricks with a golden bowl and one of those nest-webs full of blind white baby spiders. The web seemed to grow, a throbbing mass of feeble life. Then it burst, and there were spiders everywhere."

the two, forced to battle with the woman I loved—loved, mind you!—for the sanity, the very life, of the woman I detested. And yet, at that instant I almost worshiped Mrs. Hugo, since it was she who was the cause of my being there at all."

"And for what were you there?" demanded the Governor.

"For Mrs. Hugo's sake alone," Wilton returned steadily. "She had come with me as much as if she were really there. I kept her there, between me and this other woman, with her distraught face and the red marks where she had torn at the skin of her arms and neck. And then—I hated her over again for being there. But I hung on to her, for she was my only hope. I was altogether the Commissioner—but Quamina knew. That was the real trouble all through."

"What have you done to the Valideh?" I asked. And she smiled again, straight into my eyes, as she dragged the tips of her fingers softly over the strings of a marimba.

"She came to look upon Quamina," she half chanted. "Even so, in Doonqwow, would we go to look upon the slaves brought into the market-place: strange people, brought in chains from the lands beyond the Schotts. She has seen Quamina now—and she will not forget her. Her people have killed my father and trodden Doonqwow into the dust—Doonqwow, that was known as a place of magic even as far as Murzuk itself. But your people said, there is no sorcery, and that the white man's magic is the stronger. *Mash'al*—I am now a prisoner and a slave—I am now the dust of the earth myself. How, then, should I do harm to the wife of a great white emir? Let her go back, over the sea, to her own land. Is not her own white magic all-powerful?

Let her go to that for cure; why does she send you to me?"

"You must remember that I was her only hope, her one door of possible escape from out of that prison House of the Old Mensah. Like all the women of her race, she knew that it is only through men that a woman can ever hope for freedom. I have wondered, since then, if that was why she did it—that I might come there that night?"

WILTON paced nervously up and down, despairing of the inadequacy of speech, even of all those things he could not say, to picture that strange night. He had never moved from his place, nor Quamina from her divan; yet the battle had been as fierce as any physical assault.

Never changing, yet never the same, she had brought forth from some secret treasury a hundred women, each different, yet each herself. A hundred against one, it had been; and he had known that if he gave the slightest sign the victory was hers. And he had so wanted it to be so! That was the traitor within his citadel.

"Then—she sang—" he muttered.

She had sung to him—strange Arabic songs, full of the ring of fire and steel, bringing visions of the pale sands and fierce skies of the north, arid lands, vivid with the clean sting of the sun, that would dry from his body the blue-mold of this sweating, steaming coast. And there was another fire, such as was in this woman; a white-hot flame that would burn from his brain all sense of duties and responsibilities, leaving him free to go forth with her where she pleased. It would be so easy, those songs whispered to him. His word would open those doors out there for himself as well as for her. His word would pass them swiftly through the

bush, and, once on the edges of the grass country a thousand miles to the north, her word would take up the trail to that shifting strip of no-man's-land that rims the desert.

Madness, of course; for what could they hope, hiding desperately in the mazes of Africa, with that invisible, mighty hand of civilized government always reaching after them? Then, from out of that treasury of herself, had come other songs; and the sweat stood out on him at the memory of them. Given a year—a month—a day, even, of that, and all else seemed to tilt in the balance.

"She sang," he muttered again, wiping that sweat from his face. "And then—at last—the dawn came."

"And Mrs. Hugo, all this time?"

"Mrs. Hugo!" groaned Wilton. "I hated her, I tell you—yet I was clinging to her, for she stood for all those other things that the madness that was on me would have scorched and seared from my mind. But, just when I thought I could stand it no longer, the dawn came up, gray and ghostly through the banana fronds in the courtyard outside."

"The lamps paled, and I saw how white she was, with great black shadows under her eyes, as if she had emptied herself of all her vitality in vain. I knew then that I had won; it was all so different under that cold grayness. All I felt was pity. She was so alone—so helpless—so hopelessly crushed under that unseen might of our implacable law."

THAT other half of Wilton laid a finger on his lips. That moment of victory, that instant of surrender, had been the most dangerous of all—the singing cadences of her voice, that still held a secret thrill, as if she were almost rejoicing in the strength that had been her own defeat.

He wondered, now, if it had been really surrender, or a last, most desperate assault of all. Why should she be glad that he had won? He could not understand that.

"Mrs. Hugo was saved," he went dully on. "She would probably have recovered anyhow in a day or two. The remedy was simple, once you knew it. Just the leaves of the bitter christophine, well boiled. She went to sleep as soon as I gave it to her, and in that sleep the drug magic of Doonqwow dreamed itself away. When she woke she was almost herself. But I saw that I was never to be forgiven. It doesn't matter. Nothing seems to matter much now—"

FOR the moment Wilton was back again in that courtyard, with the banana fronds dropping dew on him under the chill of the dawn—a last backward glance into that hall where the white-and-gold figure lay prostrate on the divan amid the expiring lamps.

"I suppose I must pay the penalty, though," he said bitterly. "An official head on a charger for the appeasing of Mrs. Hugo—eh?"

"I'm afraid so," the Governor evenly replied. "Of course, you are due for promotion, and your past services warrant it. But, in view of Mrs. Hugo's anger and her influence at home, I can hardly—offer you promotion just now."

Wilton drew a deep breath, like a diver coming to the surface.

"You mean that—after all I have told you—I am to remain here as Commissioner—in Grand Jack?"

The Governor nodded.

"I see no reason for putting an untried man in the place of one who has passed through the fire—practically unscathed."